

EL HOLLYWOOD: ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑARRITU,
ALFONSO CUARÓN, AND GUILLERMO DEL TORO

By

ANA-MARIA LUNGU

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Jeff Menne

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Stacy Takacs

Dr. Graig Uhlin

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Name: ANA-MARIA LUNGU

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Abstract: The three Mexican filmmakers, Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Guillermo del Toro, dubbed The Three Amigos by scholar Deborah Shaw, have received a lot of critical attention in recent years. While the term Three Amigos and the scholarship that analyzes their early works from a transnational perspective seeks to other them and distinguish them from Hollywood, I argue that the three filmmakers did not depart from a place of difference, and that they embraced Hollywood filmmaking all along, from the beginning of their careers, to the most recent Academy Award recognitions. I analyze the historical context of their emergence as part of the Mexican New Wave in the 1990s, as well as their most important features and their working relationships with cast and crew, which prove that they have created their own consistent *art worlds*. Analyzing their relationships with these artists, as well as the directors' own production companies serves to establish the Three Amigos' unquestionable influence, and their position in the film world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Guillermo del Toro --dubbed The Three Amigos by scholar Deborah Shaw-- are three Mexican filmmakers who started locally, and synchronously.¹ In 2006, Cuarón's *Children of Men*, del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) solidified their international success. The three started as small-scale craftsmen and share the experience of growing up in the same cultural background. Therefore, they have the same cultural references and are part of the same generation. The foundation for academic discussion of the three directors had been laid after they established themselves in Hollywood, but does not include recent movies, such as *The Revenant* (2015), *Birdman* (2014), or *The Shape of Water* (2017). While Iñárritu constantly receives more critical and academic attention than the other two, the peak in scholarship surrounding all three seems to have been reached around 2012; despite the new features that each of them directed, the discussions and reviews are predominantly informal.

Their most recent successes were accompanied by several articles that addressed the Amigos

¹ Deborah Shaw. *The Three Amigos*. Manchester University Press, 2013.

from a “Mexicans take over Hollywood perspective,”² noting that there had been a shift in aesthetics and preoccupations from their Mexican filmmaking period to their Hollywood careers. Here, I propose instead that we look at the three directors, whose careers emerged after the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as hybridized artists who were accustomed to Hollywood filmmaking from the beginning. The label itself, *The Three Amigos*, marks them as an *other*, and throughout my thesis I argue that they did not depart from a place of difference, and that given the point in time at which they emerged as filmmakers, they were in part Hollywood filmmakers all along –from the beginning of their careers to recent years when they received Academy Awards; the three filmmakers did not depart from a place of difference in relation to Hollywood, as the name *Three Amigos* indicates. Furthermore, I argue for individualizing them and their careers by looking at their specific industrial practices and strategies for constructing their image. Despite the different paths, their first features have something in common: they all carry the label *transnational*, or are discussed in terms of “transnational aesthetics”. Ezra and Rowden define “transnational” as “[what] can be understood as the global forces that link people or institutions across nations.”³ The borders (geographical, cultural, or economic) across which ideas and products circulate are highly permeable, as technology has made production and distribution more accessible. The authors outline the role of transnationalism as a concept which “enables us to better understand the changing ways in which the contemporary world is being imagined by an increasing number of filmmakers across genres...”, and situate it at the intersection of “the global and the local.”⁴ “Across genre” alludes to the transformations of certain genres which, by nature, were linked to a certain culture or geographic space, such as the martial arts film. In their analysis of the transnational, Ezra and Rowden mention Hollywood *in*

² Anne Thompson. "Three Amigos Change Face Of Mexican Film". *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2006, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/three-amigos-change-face-mexican-138793>. Accessed 26 June 2018.

³ Elizabeth Ezra, and Terry Rowden. *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2010.1.

⁴ Ibid.

relation to the transnational, not as an opposing entity: “Although mainstream Hollywood’s key role in US cultural imperialism cannot be ignored, it is also important to recognize the impossibility of maintaining a strict dichotomy between Hollywood cinema and its ‘others’.”⁵ However, in acknowledging the dynamics between the two, Hollywood’s dominance cannot be neglected. Ezra and Rowden state that “since its ascendancy around the time of the First World War, the American film industry has systematically dominated all other film cultures and modes of cinematic imagery, production, and reception.”⁶

However, this analysis is written *in theory*, with no particular case study, and I acknowledge their thoughts on transnational aesthetics with the purpose of demonstrating why *The Three Amigos* do not fall under this theory. The transnational aesthetics argument implies, by its nature, that the filmmaker comes from the position of the outsider, with the ultimate goal of being assimilated, and that the foreign audience’s interest lies in the exoticism and foreignness of what they are seeing.

Besides escaping a solid definition, the term “transnational aesthetics” suggests a separation of non-Hollywood from Hollywood, a claim which, as I explain throughout my thesis, cannot be made with regards to Inarritu, Cuarón, and del Toro. After NAFTA was signed and went into effect in 1994, the protectionist model of film production and distribution was a thing of the past; from this point on, filmmakers enter a competitive yet fair play market where everyone, in theory, can pursue the means to achieve success --and the Three Amigos are the first generation of filmmakers to take up this opportunity. Additionally, not having to rely on government funding meant that censorship was no longer an issue.

Furthermore, Ezra and Rowden allude to the homogenous cinematic representations of the world that occur within Hollywood cinema. It is implied that because of its commitment to

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid.

profit, Hollywood is dedicated to formulas, narratives, and approaches which have proved successful across times:

[A] vision [of the world's filmgoers as sensation-starved children] has created a situation in which the US film industry has...committed itself to the production of empty and costly cinematic spectacles that, in order to maintain their mainstream inoffensiveness, must be subjected to increasingly thorough forms of cultural and ideological cleansing before being released into the global cinemascape.⁷

Because cinematic influences travel in both direction --from Hollywood to "the other"-- thinking of hybridity instead of transnationalism could be more productive. The Three Amigos do emerge from Mexico and are Mexican, but that does not mean that they cannot embody Hollywood filmmaking even in their early features.

As the three directors' careers take different directions once they become household names in Hollywood, it is impossible to bring them under the three amigos umbrella any longer. Instead of looking at their careers as transitions from the outside towards Hollywood, I argue that as post-NAFTA filmmakers, their first films were comprehensible to those accustomed to aesthetics of Hollywood --mainstream commercial aesthetics of the typical contemporary Hollywood feature that does not stray from a fairly well defined form and substance. In his article for *The New Republic*, titled "Has Hollywood Murdered the Movies?", David Denby decries an aesthetic decline of Hollywood and its "poverty of imagination", claiming that "Many big films [...] are now soaked in what can only be called corporate irony, a mad discrepancy between size and significance", and that "the intentional shift in large-scale movie production away from adults is a sad betrayal and a minor catastrophe.", while "[young people] see the movies not as a moral and aesthetic battleground, but as a media game that can be played either shrewdly or stupidly."⁸ What Denby ultimately condemns in his article that has a similar tone to Pauline Kael's "On The

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David Denby. "Has Hollywood Murdered The Movies?". *The New Republic*, 2018, <https://newrepublic.com/article/107212/has-hollywood-murdered-the-movies>. Accessed 23 June 2018.

Future of Movies” is a commercial aesthetic that has homogenized contemporary Hollywood cinema:

The structure of the movie business—the shaping of production decisions by marketing—has kicked bloody hell out of the language of film. But the business framework is not operating alone. Film, a photographic and digital medium, is perhaps more vulnerable than any of the other arts to the post-modernist habits of recycling and quotation. Imitation, pastiche, and collage have become dominant strategies, and there is an excruciating paradox in this development: two of the sprightly media forms derived from movies—commercials and music videos—began to dominate movies. The art experienced a case of blowback.”⁹

The article was written in 2012, a moment that finds all three directors very well established; if these are the aesthetics that they arrive to, it is important to indicate they have embraced their new environment differently, and that they did not depart from a place of utmost difference. Their international breakthroughs -- Iñárritu’s *Amores Perros* (2000), Cuarón’s *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (2001), and del Toro’s *The Devil’s Backbone* (2001) --enter the international scene as exotic but fully comprehensible to a Hollywood audience. As scholars have assigned different labels to the Mexican New Wave and its movies --transnational (Shaw¹⁰), postnational (Baer and Long¹¹), and post-classical (Thanouli¹²), it is perhaps useful to turn towards a term that not only encompasses theoretical, social, and political dimensions, but which includes the industrial practices that individualize them. Howard Becker’s *Art Worlds*¹³ incorporates various aspects of an artwork and acknowledges that it is not the result of an isolated individual’s work, but rather the child of anyone and everyone involved in producing, promoting, and creating the product in both theory and practice. The Three Amigos’ industrial practices and their consistency in employing certain

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Deborah Shaw. “Deconstructing and Reconstructing Transnational Cinemas”, *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating Transnationalism in Spanish and Latin American Film*. S Dennison (ed.) Coleccion Tamesis: serie A, monografias, Tamesis, Woodbridge

¹¹ Hester Baer and Ryan Fred Long. "Transnational Cinema And The Mexican State In Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mama Tambien*". *South Central Review*, vol 21, no. 3, 2004, pp. 150-168. *Johns Hopkins University Press*, doi:10.1353/scr.2004.0031.150-160.

¹² Eleftheria Thanouli. POST-CLASSICAL NARRATION, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 2006.4:3,

¹³ Howard Saul Becker. *Art worlds*. Berkley: University of California Press. 1984.

crew members and actors throughout their careers speak to their individuality as filmmakers, despite a popular label that implies they are together in their otherness. Later on, I analyze who contributes to the making of each art world, and show that Iñárritu, del Toro, and Cuarón have established their own art worlds by working with the same crews throughout their careers, and that despite the auteurist (self-)representations, these worlds are just as much the brainchildren of writer Guillermo Arriaga, DoP Emmanuel Lubezki, Dan Laustsen, and Rodrigo Prieto, production designer Eugenio Caballero, and actors Diego Luna and Gael Garcia Bernal.

After his trilogy, which bridged the success of his debut to an even bigger success in Hollywood, Iñárritu's "art world" changes: his next feature, *Biutiful*, focuses on one protagonist and his internal turmoil, and the interwoven narrative is abandoned --along with his working relationship with screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga, coincidentally or not. Cuarón's debut, *Solo Con Tu Pareja* (1991), was a comedic Mexican "cautionary tale", followed by two Hollywood adaptations, a return to Mexican cinema through *Y Tu Mama Tambien* --a powerful statement of self-reflexivity and criticism --a true "postnational" piece, as Thanouli would call it --and a science fiction based on P. D. James' novel *Children of Men*, and a Harry Potter movie. After a long hiatus came *Gravity* (2013), making Cuarón's body of work a truly eclectic one. Del Toro has been, from a "film-world" perspective, the most consistent of the three: his debut *Cronos* in 1993 had set the tone for a solid and coherent body of sci-fi movies which recently culminated with the critically acclaimed *The Shape of Water*. His cinematic universe revolves around Hispanic mythology and mythical creatures and his "film-world" has been consistent throughout his transition to Hollywood and after: in addition to his commitment to science fiction and horror, del Toro has developed close working relationships with crew members whom he worked with on several of his features and who ultimately contributed to developing his latest project, *The Shape of Water*.

My primary research methods are historical and industrial analyses; the terms "transnational", "postnational", and "post-classical" that scholars have used in discussing the

Mexican New Wave have deemed it necessary to include a short, historical outline of the Mexican film industry regulations from the Golden Age to the early '90s. The New Wave is often regarded as a rebirth of Mexican cinema or even a second Golden Age:¹⁴ the four decades between these two moments were marked by an almost continuous lack of funding and political instability, and the momentum for a New Wave had been built ever since the '70s. Scholars like Deborah Shaw, Andrea Noble, Misha McLaird, and Baer and Long cover this historical aspect in detail and their pieces represent a stepping stone for most analyses of contemporary Mexican cinema. In addition, I turn to discourse analysis for interviews with the directors, their production teams and DoPs for information that can consolidate our understanding of who contributes to the making of the art world, a concept to which I turn as an alternative to the elusive "aesthetics."

Occasionally, trade journals provide "behind the scenes" details and interviews which add another layer of information that is particularly helpful in answering my research questions. In a *Sight and Sound* article from 2010, "Syndromes of a New Century", Nick James selects 30 key films for the 21st century, and Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* made the cut; what is interesting about these types of lists is how these directors and their works are placed in conversation in the larger context: this selection speaks about cultural and social themes of the century, and emphasizes what Thanouli and Baer and Long refer to as: a body of films from different corners of the world that have similar themes and concerns at the same point in time.

A lot of the scholarship surrounding the three directors revolves around transnational film theory; although I argue throughout my thesis that their recent films and their Hollywood careers have made this approach outdated, scholars like Deborah Shaw, Paul Julian Smith, Carlos González Gutiérrez, Celestino Deleyto, and many others have established a valuable scholarly foundation of the Three Amigos' early careers before they moved to Hollywood. While this specific body of work addresses the filmmakers' early success from a transnational perspective,

¹⁴ Carlos Aguilar. "How Mexican Cinema Entered Its Second 'Golden Age'". *Americasquarterly.Org*, <http://www.americasquarterly.org/content/and-el-oscar-goes>. Accessed 23 June 2018.

some of the scholars, like Deborah Shaw and Amy Sara Carroll place their research within the larger conversation of the transnational theory as a whole. Carroll analyzes the role of recent international coproductions to bring attention to yet another niche within the larger subject of the transnational aesthetic: what she calls the post-NAFTA aesthetic.¹⁵

While exploring what has brought them together as the Three Amigos, Shaw also looks at the different contradictions in the careers of the three directors, who, at the time of her writing in 2013, had not made any movies in Mexico for over a decade; all three were nominated for the Academy Awards the same year, 2007, and managed to gather both commercial and critical recognition. In her book, which was the first one dedicated to the Mexican directors, and named after the title under which Iñárritu, Cuarón, and del Toro were going to be known and discussed extensively in the academic world, Shaw focuses on Iñárritu and analyzes his career as an independent filmmaker. Her decision to narrow in on Iñárritu's work comes as an attempt to identify what had always brought him slightly more attention than the other two, despite all three using an "international film language." Decades before, James Potts had inquired whether such an international film language exists, and instead leaned towards

a new national school of filmmaking, which may be almost wholly untouched by European conventions, and will require us to go back to square one in thinking about the principle and language of cinematography.¹⁶

In summary, Potts claims that no matter the filmmakers' backgrounds, there will be a set of "rules" that they adhere to in order to convey their message outside of their community, rules which they can apply to an indigenous structure.

Shaw cites two articles written by Eleftheria Thanouli, a Greek Film Theory Professor, who advocated that Iñárritu's body of work falls under an international, post-classical filmmaking trend, based on his choice of non-conventional narrative structures and the lack of a sole

¹⁵ Amy Sara Carroll. Global Mexico's Coproduction: Babel, Pan's Labyrinth, and Children of Men. *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 2012 4(2). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4bp4x1sg>

¹⁶ James Potts. "Is There An International Film Language?" *Sight and Sound*. 48 (2) Spring 1979, 74-81.

protagonist. She mentions other movies from the same time period: *Trainspotting* (1996), *Lola rennt* (1998), *Fight Club* (1999), *Cidade de Deus* (2002), all with similar narration modes.¹⁷

Thanouli responds to Bordwell's disagreement with her term and his negation of any change in Hollywood storytelling; he gathers any changes under the term of "intensified continuity"¹⁸ and admits to certain stylistic revisions within the last four decades, but Thanouli advocates for her post-classical trend: chronologically, it follows the classical Hollywood period, and has a complex bond to the classical model. Regardless, of the terms used, both acknowledge the shift -- the time period to which Bordwell attributes an extensive use of "intensified continuity" coincides with the beginning of the Mexican New Wave in the 1990s.

Similarly, Baer and Long inquire into the common aesthetics of the transnational through recent features that engage with themes of chance and contingency: *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001), *Lucia y el sexo* (2001), *Los Amantes del Círculo Polar* (1998), *Sliding Doors* (1998), *Run Lola Run* (1998), *Amores Perros*, and *21 Grams* (2003),¹⁹ In citing Žižek's prediction of a "a new life experience" that cannot be contained within a linear narrative, Baer and Long speculate whether these films can be categorized as postnational, and show an interest in understanding how participating in "global systems of film production, distribution, and exhibition impacts national cinematic traditions."²⁰ Their inquiry focuses on Cuarón's *Y Tu Mama Tambien* as an example of the liminal space in which Mexico situates itself: between national and global cinema, as well as an interpretation of Mexican history and the nation's path to independence and self-searching.²¹ Approaching Mexican New Wave features as metaphors for a

¹⁷ Eleftheria Thanouli. POST-CLASSICAL NARRATION, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 2006.4:3, 185.

¹⁸ David Bordwell. "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style In Contemporary American Film". *Film Quarterly*, vol 55, no. 3, 2002, University Of California Press, doi:10.1525/fq.2002.55.3.16. 16-28.

¹⁹ Hester Baer and Ryan Fred Long. "Transnational Cinema And The Mexican State In Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mama Tambien*". *South Central Review*, vol 21, no. 3, 2004, pp. 150-168. *Johns Hopkins University Press*, doi:10.1353/scr.2004.0031.150-160.

²⁰ Ibid., 151.

²¹ Ibid., 152.

troubled past is a recurrent trope: *Amores Perros* was also the subject of similar analyses, which addressed the absent father and the broken family as a trope for the state.²² Baer and Long carefully articulate some of the common traits of transnational cinema (national allegories, contingency, chance) and reiterate the “universal form with local content” formula that scholars reiterate with regards to the Three Amigos.

²² Deborah Shaw. *Contemporary cinema of Latin America: Ten Key Films*. A&C Black, 2003. 180.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW WAVE THAT MADE IT

Most of the attempts to define “transnational” bring aesthetics into the discussion as a means to pinpoint some of the elements that bring different films together under the same label. As the body of scholarly work surrounding the three directors and discussing their transnational aesthetics has increased, so has the questioning of national and transnational cinemas. As “national” cinema became a problematic term, in the sense that it was difficult to limit the analysis to the boundaries of a nation in the context of globalization, the term “transnational” has replaced it to encompass the cultural, social, and economic developments that are rarely contained strictly within geographical boundaries.

This New Wave that the Amigos were a part of and that facilitated their transition to Hollywood was supported by the mere timing of it all: in an era of globalization, Hollywood was more open to foreign talent- an openness that was not available for the 70’s attempt to a New Wave, political conditions aside. Although accounts of a “cinematic boom” in Mexican cinema have become clichés of the press, the Amigos’ prominence in Hollywood was a well-paced process and coincided with substantial developments in the Mexican film industry within the last two decades. The beginning of their careers came from a place of transition, long after the Mexican Golden Age, shortly after a failed attempt at a New Wave, and during a time of very

little support support for the arts from the government. In the year 2000, when *Amores Perros* came out, only 28 features were released-20% of what the Golden Age produced in 1950.²³ The early 2000s represented a key moment for Mexican cinema: there was a higher number of independent productions, which means less funding from the state and the ability to escape state censorship, which in itself has become more permissive in the years before *Amores*.²⁴ Simultaneously, the US turns its gaze towards Mexican cinema, enticed by hip-hop soundtracks, higher quality productions, non-linear narratives, the approach of new themes²⁵ like bold sexuality and extreme violence, featuring stars in the making, like Gael Garcia Bernal and Diego Luna.

The lack of financial support from the government was a key element in Mexican cinema's international anonymity during these times, and in the three directors' determination to seek better opportunities abroad, in order to be able to focus on creative resourcing, rather than a never-ending financial *Don Quijotian* runaround. The success of *Amores* and *Y Tu Mama* seemed like a secure enough foundation for Iñárritu and Cuarón to take the leap into a full-blown Hollywood career. *Y Tu Mamá También*, which brought actors Diego Luna and Gael García Bernal to international recognition, was going to be the last true Mexican story for a while- and despite Iñárritu's *Biutiful* (2010) and Del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* being partly funded with Mexican resources, both narratives were set in Spain and utilized Spanish casts. I will expand on the importance of a cast and crew towards the end of my analysis.

The success of the Three Amigos encouraged more domestic success for Mexican filmmaking and solidified what was now clear to be a Mexican New Wave. Lesser-known directors were claiming success of their own back in Mexico, and although they might not be familiar to Academy Awards followers, Carlos Reygadas and Amat Escalante won Best Director

²³ Carlos Aguilar. "How Mexican Cinema Entered Its Second 'Golden Age'". *Americasquarterly.Org*, <http://www.americasquarterly.org/content/and-el-oscar-goes>. Accessed 29 May 2018.

²⁴ Judith A. M. Costello. "Politics and Popularity: The Current Mexican Cinema, Review": *Literature and Arts of the Americas*, 38:1, 31-38, DOI: 10.1080/08905760500112386.

²⁵ While these are by no means "new themes" in and of themselves, a gay relationship like the one featured in *Y Tu Mama* and the copious amount of blood in *Amores* reflect a certain degree of newfound freedom that comes with the productions being financially independent from the state.

at Cannes Film Festival in 2012 and 2013 for *Post Tenebras Lux* (Reygadas) and *Heli* (Escalante). Others were quick to realize the immense potential that the almost 40 million Spanish-speakers in the U.S hold. Eugenio Derbez is a prime example, having gone from a career at Televisa to directing *Instructions Not Included* (2013), which became the highest grossing movie in the history of the Mexican box office, and the most successful Hispanic feature ever released in the US, with a worldwide gross of \$100 mil.

When put into perspective, the foundation that the Three Amigos established for both domestic and international success becomes more evident. Analyses of their initial success in Mexico surfaced around 2004-2005 and constitute a big portion of the overall scholarship surrounding the three directors. One of the most prominent voices is Deborah Shaw, who pays close attention to the production context and employs a critical analysis of some of the most important works in order to produce a compelling and coherent academic representation of their works thus far. Subsequently, Shaw co-edited *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo del Toro* and *Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Breaking into the Global Market* and wrote *Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Ten Key Films*, which makes her one of the most consistent and dedicated academic voice that has documented the path of the Three Amigos.

One of the angles that the trio has been analyzed from is that of transnational cinema. Shaw argues, based on previous scholarship, that the term “transnational” is starting to be questioned by film theorists, as a result of the increasing hybridity of cinema. She quotes Andrew Higson’s “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema” as a key essay that introduced the term and which explain that the label “transnational” has come to replace the far more limiting one of “national cinemas” as “a new conceptual framework within which to examine film cultures: *transnational* might be a subtler means of describing cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained by national boundaries.”²⁶

²⁶ Ibid., 49.

Shaw notes the difficulty of defining transnational cinema, a difficulty encountered by most scholars who have attempted to define it: Ezra and Rowden's essay from *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, besides providing an excellent account of the ongoing conversation surrounding transnational filmmaking, is at fault, Shaw says, for attempting to pinpoint the essence of the transnational: the problem is built into the question; one cannot successfully provide an all-encompassing answer to this question.²⁷ The attempt to define it is, indeed, too broad to serve as a working definition, and too essentialist in its formulation:

The transnational comprises both globalization --in cinematic terms, Hollywood's domination of world film markets- and the counter-hegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and Third World countries.²⁸

Shaw continues by pointing out how much this definition restricts the type of movies we would look at within this framework, namely only movies that have migration and diaspora as themes, or that come from "in-between spaces of culture."²⁹ Instead, she turns to an article from Mette Hjort, in which she "produces a detailed typology that links the concept of transnationalism to different models of cinematic production, each motivated by specific concerns and designed to achieve particular effects."³⁰ She then nominates fifteen categories to engage in our analysis of "transnational" films in order to avoid the aforementioned problems. Out of the fifteen, of interest to the argument I am making are "Transnational modes of production", "Transnational modes of narration", "Exilic and diasporic filmmaking", "Cultural exchange", and "Transnational directors."³¹

²⁷ Ibid., 50.

²⁸ Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden. *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2006. 1.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁰ Mette Hjort. "On The Plurality Of Cinematic Transnationalism". *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, Nataša Durovicová and Kathleen E. Newman, 1st ed., Routledge, London, 2009, Accessed 29 May 2018. 15.

³¹ Deborah Shaw. "Deconstructing and Reconstructing Transnational Cinemas", *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating Transnationalism in Spanish and Latin American Film*. S Dennison (ed.) Coleccion Tamesis: serie A, monografias, Tamesis, Woodbridge.52.

First, the focus on production contexts is undoubtedly a more narrowed down approach which helps to advance our understanding of transnational cinema, and in doing so, Shaw looks at concrete examples of South American “national” films distributed internationally. The well-known trio of Mexican filmmaking facilitated their entry into Hollywood through an already established domestic success, that echoed internationally, and this came at a moment when the distribution modes were expanding significantly, through DVDs and online viewing for audiences who did not have immediate access.

In an interview that Iñárritu gave to *New Perspectives Quarterly* editor Nathan Gardels in 2007, he says: “We are no longer home alone.”³² globalization has exported images of our world to all corners of the globe and brought to us glimpses of culture and civilization that would otherwise have been inaccessible. In the summer of 2008, Mexican cinemas showed a certain Corona commercial during their previews; an Indian village receives mysteriously looking boxes, which turn out to be filled with Corona beer bottles. Soon after, women’s saris are traded for colorful layered skirts, snake charmers turn into mariachis, and the tagline “Mexican spirit knows no boundaries” wraps up the lightning-fast colonization,³³ almost as a prediction of how Mexican directors would take over the world with their productions.

The term itself, “transnational aesthetics,” as well as this approach to discussing contemporary cinema, is outdated: film has reached universal language status, and we can no longer rely on cultural, geographical, or economic borders to define national from transnational. Film is no longer bound by scope or access to a specific market- the blockbuster culture, in which a movie is often released outside the US first, and makes more money internationally than domestically testifies to the worldwide distribution and cultural universality. Besides “transnational”, “directors without borders” is another structure that is persistently linked to these

³² Ibid.

³³ Paul Julian Smith. "Transnational Cinemas: The Cases Of Mexico, Argentina, And Brazil". *Theorizing World Cinema*, Lucia Nagib et al., 1st ed., I.B. Tauris, London, 2018, Accessed 1 June 2018.

directors- and it would appear that this tends to be utilized for certain geographical spaces in relation to Hollywood and implies they are radically foreign and alien in their views of Hollywood. While this concept would not be used for discussing the films of Canadian-born James Cameron or Ridley Scott, it is prevalent among discussions of Hispanic directors in recent years. As to why that is and why now, scholars have pointed to a re-mapping of the world, disregarding physical boundaries of the nation-state, as a result of mass globalization. Seonjoo Park writes that the critical consensus is that we're moving towards thinking beyond any restricting form of nation, and that "any issue in any part of the world now cannot be fully addressed entirely within national boundaries."³⁴

Other scholars have approached the transnational aesthetic subject as an umbrella term and identified within it specific angles that help guide the discussion in more productive ways; Juan Poblete regards *Amores Perros*, along with the cinematic techniques it employs, as an example of a "critique of the impact of neoliberalism on the national societies of Latin America in times of globalization."³⁵ These new directors, then, use "the master's tools to dismantle the master's house"- the tools are formal Hollywood conventions- with a twist of vernacular and local forms of expression, with the ultimate scope of criticizing the impact that neoliberalism and globalization have had on Latin American cultures. The result, Poblete says, is a "neopopular mode", a marriage between an "MTV style" and political allegories that that is globally accessible and productive.³⁶

Given the subject of my inquiry, it is relevant then to ask how globalization has affected the Mexican culture and implicitly filmmaking. I argue that the attempt to a Mexican New Wave in the '70s was not just a stepping stone that solidified the most recent one, which turned

³⁴ Seonjoo Park. "Towards a Transnational Aesthetics: Literary Displacement and Translation as a Transnational Narrative Space." *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2006. 3215914.

³⁵ Juan Poblete. "New National Cinemas in a Transnational Age". *Discourse*, Vol. 26, No. 1/2, *Mexican Cinema from the Post-Mexican Condition* (Winter & Spring 2004). 214.

³⁶ Ibid.

successful, but its remains still linger in the universe of the latest New Wave; the allegories in *Amores* and *Y Tu Mama* present an interpretation of the contemporary history of Mexico in which the goals and expectations of the 1960s and '70s are replaced by poverty and violence that reflects in a generation of youths engaging in dangerous criminal activity, and on the other hand, in corruption, as seen in those that are favored by neoliberalism.

Almost a decade before the release of *Amores Perros*, Nestor Garcia Canclini writes, in a study published by *CONACULTA* about Mexico's spectators, that there is a niche in the spectatorship of individuals with higher education, interested in contemporary society. Being a film that illustrates issues such as crime and corruption, *Amores Perros* seems to satisfy exactly this niche. Additionally, Misha MacLaird's *Aesthetics and Politics in the Mexican Film Industry* provides a vital history of the state regulations which lead to the moment of Iñárritu's breakthrough with *Amores Perros*, and observes in detail how multiple attempts to revitalize film industry legislation in 1992, 1998, 2001, and 2006, eventually encouraged production. Understanding how the regulations and policies affected Mexican filmmaking and its distribution outside of Mexico is essential in order to situate the success that was to follow; in this respect, MacLaird explains how the NAFTA was rather unilateral in terms of economic advantage and film making:

The frustration for Mexican filmmakers when faced with the double economic disadvantage since the effectuation of NAFTA is that it stemmed primarily from an economic agreement aimed at bringing down the cultural and political barriers separating US and Mexican film markets and letting market demand determine success, regardless of a film's national origin.³⁷

The history of the state's support, or lack thereof, at times, for the film industry is complicated, and cyclical- some administrations recognized early on, after the Revolution in 1920, its potential to serve as a state apparatus. The majority of the scholarship on contemporary Mexican cinema analyses and mentions three main factors (the fall of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI),

³⁷ Misha MacLaird. *Aesthetics And Politics In The Mexican Film Industry*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 35.

private investment and transnational influences) and two films: *Amores Perros* and *Y Tu Mamá También*. But after the revolution, it became more and more clear that audiences prefer Hollywood movies and aesthetics.

The Three Amigos constitute what is considered the second Mexican New Wave, after the first one in the '70s failed to fully develop. What is essential in understanding this Mexican New Wave is acknowledging that, although it is Mexican in its identity, it does not take place in Mexico, or at least has not for very long. Del Toro left Mexico in 1993, after the production for *Cronos* was completed, encouraged by the traumatic kidnapping of his father, followed by Iñárritu's move to L.A. in 2000 and Cuarón's relocation to London in 2001.

The political instability of the '60s left little room for prioritizing the arts and film production, and the students who are protesting on the streets of D.F. in '68 are the ones to return, a few years later, in the film schools and labs to voice their thoughts. The following decade is charged with a lot of energy from these young filmmakers and presents a valuable body of work, with films directed by Arturo Ripstein and Jorge Fons. The seventies were a decade of cultural revolution that favored the seventh art; to aid domestic production and distribution, Echevarria privatized 15% of the theatres to prioritize the distribution of Mexican productions and a growing number of theaters were owned by Mexican companies. The lack of screen space was counteracted by film clubs and spaces where filmmakers would exchange ideas - similar to how the French Nouvelle Vague unfolded; surprisingly or not, the French movement was going to be a major inspiration for the '90s New Wave.³⁸

Although the late '60s and '70s represented a significant advance for the Mexican film industry, it was considered just a stepping stone for what was to follow in the '90s with the true New Wave; the lack of screen space was, at that time, too big of an obstacle for an unstable industry to overcome. Despite this, it did create a platform for dialogue and exchanging ideas

³⁸ Ibid., 37.

between artists. The economic crisis caused by the oil boom in the same decade postponed the rebirth of Mexican cinema for yet another decade, and it was only in the early '90s that new attempts to a New Wave were even viable.

Unsurprisingly, what made the '90s seem like a new era from a cultural perspective was a shift political power; as democracy became stronger, the Mexican government decided to revise its policies vis-a-vis the arts, and the funds allocated to this sector were privatized. Changes happened throughout the decade and filmmakers were very much involved; film director Marcela Fernandez Violante, proposed a bill in 1994 with the three main issues being renewing the filmmaking mechanism, exploiting the capabilities of the national film industry and preserving the national heritage.³⁹ Production was still hybrid in nature: the majority of the funds were private, and only a small portion came from the government. In his analysis of production patterns in Mexico, Paul Julian Smith analyzes how the production has shifted, from a protectionist model that prioritized cultural identity to the innovation model, which opened up the industry to commercial films and Hollywood aesthetics. However, he states, this was the decade with a historically low number of productions: between 1995 and 1997, there were only 12 productions every year.⁴⁰ Only after the income tax bill, which favored filmed investors, was introduced in 2004 did the number of productions increase significantly: by 711% from 1997 to 2011.⁴¹ The three movies that generated discussion of a Mexican New Wave (*Amores Perros*, *Tu Mama Tambien*, and *The Devil's Backbone*) were privately funded, and contrary to the general new wave attitudes, were not a counter aesthetic of Hollywood --they *were* Hollywood.

The way in which contemporary Mexican cinema has been discussed in terms of "transnational aesthetics" could receive clarification if we turned to discussions of new waves and third cinema; although the *Nuevo Cine Mexicano* (*Mexican New Wave*) started in early 1990s, a

³⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁰ Jethro Southar. *Gael Garcia Bernal and The Latin American New Wave*. London: Portico. 2008. 52.

⁴¹ Misha Maclaird. *Aesthetics And Politics In The Mexican Film Industry*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 35.

wave that only came to significant international attention with *Amores Perros*, it is worthwhile looking back to a brief history of the regulations and attitudes that facilitated the Golden Age (approx. 1930-1950) to understand the circumstances surrounded this New Wave, and to acknowledge the failed attempt to one in the 1970s, which, scholars have argued, only worked to empower the most recent one.⁴² The cinematic success of the '70s was short-lived --Mexican audiences indulged in New Hollywood productions, while the domestic features, with their low budgets, could not compete.

The genesis of Mexican cinema resembled that of any nation outside the US or France, with the Lumiere shorts being distributed around the same time they were in the US and with the first Mexican productions shortly after that (*Don Juan Tenorio*, dir. Toscano Barragan, 1898). The president in office, Porfirio Diaz, soon realized that film can be a powerful tool in consolidating his political status and encouraged productions.⁴³ By 1920s, it was a full-blown industry, and the advent of sound encouraged bigger budget productions. However, this industry was heavily dependent on US for technological resources- the start of a long struggle to dismiss the big shadow that Hollywood was casting on Mexican filmmaking by way of resource power and box office success in Mexico.⁴⁴ As soon as the Mexican industry became a strong competitor during its Golden Age, any support from the US was cut, a decision supported by Mexico's fraternization with Cuba in the embargo dispute.

Simultaneous to the Mexican Revolution was the rise of Hollywood. However, after the revolution, the Mexican film industry takes off into a full-blown Golden Era, but by the 1950s, the popularity that television had gained, along with a cinema which depicted an idealized Mexico as a result of its financial dependency to the state, lead to a chronic cultural crisis

⁴² Andrea Noble. *Mexican National Cinema*. London:Routledge, 2005.27.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Charles Ramirez Berg. "The Cinematic Invention of Mexico:The Poetics and Politics of the Fernandez-Figueroa Style". *The Mexican Cinema Project*.1994.13.

(additionally, a post-war US wants to support its own film industry instead of competitors, and withdraws any support it had been offering to its neighbors). While the unions in Mexico were turning away new talent and promoted an extreme selectiveness, Hollywood was encouraging new filmmakers. Carlos Monsivais outlines the contrast between this reality and the audience's desire to see relatable characters and examples of how to survive a post-revolution Mexico, "plagiarizing" the character's way of life.⁴⁵ Around the same time, the notion of cultural uniqueness (or nationalism) was perpetuated with the scope of establishing Mexico's newfound identity- a journey which will mark its history up until *Y Tu Mama Tambien* --by depicting and voicing what was considered to be the essence of Mexico as a nation.

An important part in expanding its resources during the Golden Age were co-productions: Mexico had a long and fruitful cinematic partnership with Cuba, a relationship which started with music co-productions and evolved into a cinematic partnership. Overall, the cultural exchange between Latin American nations was not unusual by way of borrowing actors, however, Mexico's links to Cuba were more evident when it came to cinema; Cuba's film industry path was similar to that of Mexico and welcomed its own Golden Era after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Along with the cultural similarities, the financial aspect and the easily accessible filming locations were certainly encouraging of co-productions.⁴⁶

Facing a cultural crisis as the Golden era was ending, Mexico needed a New Wave to embody the new generation and its sociocultural climate. The first attempt, unsuccessful, was in the 1970s and preceded the one that Iñárritu, Cuarón, and del Toro were a part of in the '90s. The second New Wave was supported by some significant political changes: the election of PAN (National Action Party) and the advent of NAFTA. The socio-political changes that Carl J. Mora analyzes as a catalyst for the second New Wave start with the First Contest of Experimental

⁴⁵ Carlos Monsivais. "Mythologies". *Mexican Cinema*. Paulo Antonio Paranagua. 1st ed BFI, 1995. 118.

⁴⁶ Maricruz Castro Ricalde. "Rumba Caliente Beats Foxtrot: Cinematic Cultural Exchanges Between Mexico and Cuba". *Global Mexican Cinema: Its Golden Age*. Robert McKee Irwin and Maricruz Castro Ricalde. 1st ed. London: BFI, 2013.40.

Cinema in 1965, organized by *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica* (STPC).⁴⁷ While it had no significant outcome in and of itself, this is the moment that marks a clear need for change. The STPC represented a place of interaction between the older and younger generations of filmmakers as well as the site of tensions between scholars and filmmakers. These tensions echoed into the nation as a whole: there were numerous protests, which peaked with the October '68 events and the oppression of the Diaz Ordaz administration that followed, in the form of fund cuts for the film industry and even fewer theaters. His *sexenio* (a six year presidential term) is remembered as the most austere in recent history --not just for economic reasons, but also in terms of censorship.⁴⁸ As a result, many filmmakers turned to independent funding to keep making movies and wipe away the memory of the Golden Era, which felt outdated and out of place.

The next administration came with radical changes for cinema and the other arts; between 1970-1976, Luis Echevarria prioritized film schools and funding the cinema industry as a way of promoting Mexico and its values. It was during this time that CUEC (Centro Universitario des Estudios Cinematograficos) and CCC (Centro Cinematografico) were established, giving young filmmakers the platform they need to learn, research, and experiment. Additionally, new theatres and cultural institutions were set up to compensate for the previous government's cuts. Overall, the government's involvement in the arts sector has significantly improved, providing not only financial assistance, but also developing the infrastructure, in an effort to revive the cinema which is reminiscent of the Golden Era.

Although the Echevarria administration helped the film industry with reforms, increased financial support, and simply by following that of Diaz Ordaz, Mexican cinema was still marked by the common denominator of all eras: censorship. The events of '68 determined an even

⁴⁷ Carl J. Mora "Motion Pictures: 1960-96". *Encyclopedia Of Mexico: History, Society & Culture*. Michael S Werner. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 1998. Web.

⁴⁸ Misha Maclaird. *Aesthetics And Politics In The Mexican Film Industry*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 80.

stronger need to portray a peaceful and flourishing Mexico, an image which was constructed not only in films, but in all types of media. Since any production applying for state funding would be subjected to these content regulations, filmmakers turn to private, but low-budget productions and international distribution, or tried to identify gaps to escape censorship at home; *Canoa* (1976), a Mexican feature that alludes to the '68 events, directed by Felipe Cazals, identified such a loophole, made it into cinemas and became fairly successful.⁴⁹

The case of Cazals' *Canoa* sheds light on the state of the industry at this point; the conditional financial support and the various degrees of censorship have split the Mexican film industry of the '70s into three. The main sector was the government-funded productions, subject to censorship; the independent sector merged into the government-funded, and the third one was a subdivision of the independent sector, which focused on international distribution and had very low budgets. The latter preceded the '90s New Wave in its radical attitude towards filmmaking and against censorship. The filmmakers that emerged from these settings, who were not affiliated to any film schools, bear many similarities to Iñárritu, Cuarón, and del Toro; both generations exhibited frustration with government policies towards the film industry and sought private funding. Their critiques of society and corruption were recurrent themes both then and now.

The '70s left behind an economically drained Mexico, only made worse by corruption and nepotism. With the election of Miguel de la Madrid in 1982, there was hope that the film industry was going to survive the effects of the oil boom (which continue to affect the economy until mid '90s) and the general low funding allocated to this sector. One of the events that created a sense of reassurance was the birth of IMCINE (Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía), led by the reputable filmmaker Albert Isaac; another was the release of Paul Leduc's *Frida* (1985), which was selected for the Academy Awards that year (but was not nominated). *Frida* resembles,

⁴⁹ Hester Baer and Ryan Fred Long. "Transnational Cinema And The Mexican State In Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mama Tambien*". *South Central Review*, vol 21, no. 3, 2004, pp. 150-168. *Johns Hopkins University Press*, doi:10.1353/scr.2004.0031.154.

in some ways, *Amores Perros*, with its critically acclaimed, exotic depiction of Mexico, and the producer, Manuel Barbancho Ponce, released another international success that same year- *Doña Herlinda Y su Hijo*.⁵⁰

Despite all hardships, Mexico still found itself in an advantaged position compared to other South American nations, mainly due to a level of state support that was still higher compared to the rest of the continent, as well as support from American investors and Hollywood's technological support. In spite of the many changes it had survived, national identity is still a theme that contemporary filmmakers engage with. Similarly, Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* tackles issues of broken national identity, criticizing the political context by showing the aftermath: broken homes, corruption, and extreme violence. Allegorizing the past implies an emotional distance vis-a-vis history and an orientation towards the future.

The abundance in scholarship discussing the Mexican Golden Era and the New Wave in the '90s, but the four decades in between have been neglected, other than merely historical accounts of productions during certain administrations. Hernandez-Rodriguez identifies this gap and, in short, attributes the film crisis that marked these four decades to a combination of issues: economics, poor administration, external pressure from the US (withdrawing financial and technological support) and increasing distribution of international films in Mexico. In the new millennium, one encounters a similar situation with *Amores Perros*: the upper-middle class, with a higher level of education, resonated with the film's satirical nature and its portrayal of a raw Mexico.

While the Golden Era focused on establishing a cinematic national identity following an almost decade long Revolution, the Mexican New Wave is concerned with successfully and creatively exporting an identity; part of this identity, as seen in *Amores Perros*, is Mexico's capital, but the *haciendas* and rural villages are not negated as part of the past: the pastoral

⁵⁰ Walter Goodman. "SCREEN: 'DONA HERLINDA'". *Nytimes.Com*, 1986, <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/04/movies/screen-dona-herlinda.html>. Accessed 16 June 2018.

landscapes in *Y Tu Mama* testify to that. Although the New Wave filmmakers wanted to distinguish themselves from the *cinema du papa* of Mexico, they do not refute the past; instead, they turn towards Hollywood aesthetics and film language- not embracing, but competing with them- to extend their reach beyond the borders.

As Mexican president Carlos Salinas was approaching the end of his *sexenio*, his priority was signing NAFTA, so that Mexico could make a step forward towards a First World economy; however, the idealistically designed agreement proved to be imperfect for a nation like Mexico, as it failed to consider several aspects. Certain protection measures which had been in place for decades, such as the quota law, which reserved 30% of the screening space for Mexican productions, were removed, as they did not comply with the principles of free trade.⁵¹ To balance out the disappearance of the quota law, Salinas established CONACULTA (National Council for Arts and Culture) as soon as he entered office, and it was replaced in 2015 by *Secretaria de Cultura*.⁵² Preparing the terrain for NAFTA, from a cultural perspective, meant privatization of both exhibition and distribution. As a result, new cinemas were built in more affluent parts of town, and the ticket prices increased, as they were no longer regulated by the state, given theaters the freedom to set their own prices. While all of these changes had an effect on the audience demographics, Mexico was still ranking as one of the biggest *Espanablante* audiences worldwide. Ultimately, these administrative changes were what determined the triumph of the '90 New Wave over the previous one in the '70s, which faced cut downs on screening spaces. The New Wave was supported by measures which not only expanded, but also modernized the infrastructure.

Alfonso Arau's *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (1992) was a highly successful feature that emerged in the middle of all these changes; Arau abode by the *Nueva Ley Federal de Cinematografía*, which stated that productions would only receive 60% of the funding from the

⁵¹ Misha Maclaird. *Aesthetics And Politics In The Mexican Film Industry*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 81-82.

⁵² Ibid., 89

IMCINE, while the rest would be privately sourced, and released the first production that served as the guinea pig of the new regulations⁵³ (a decade and a half later, *Eficine 189*, a tax-incentive project that allowed taxpayers to fund film production with their taxes, would fund 1 mil. Pesos for a movie, or up to 80% of the production costs.)⁵⁴ His private funding came from an airline company, *Aviasco*, the Mexican Ministry of Tourism, and the local administration of the filming location.⁵⁵ Interestingly, the tone of the movie was radically different from what was to follow: Arau depicts a, idealized, rural Mexico, reminiscent of the Golden Age productions, a bold contrast to the amendments and the uncertainty that characterized the '90s. Given that almost half of the funding had to be sourced by the director from private investors, those financing the production had a real interest in supporting what appealed to the public, unlike IMCINE which often contributed blindly. This also affected how directors thought of their own projects: former president of Altavista recalls the Mexican film industry before NAFTA, and states that “directors didn't care if their film even got distributed because their business, or what fed them, was getting the film made. Directors stopped making personal projects and opened their minds a bit and said: I would like people to see my films.”⁵⁶ Although these measures were aimed at bettering the film industry, Mexican cinema had not yet become the export product that filmmakers envisioned. The industry had been operating within two major influences: the external influence of Hollywood, which imposed certain industrial standards, and the internal pressure to address and portray aspects surrounding the concept of nation and identity.

Once they gained recognition, the Three Amigos decided to extend their influence in the film industry and set up Cha Cha Cha Films, which started distributing their movies in

⁵³ Stephen M Hart. *A Companion to Latin American film*. Tamesis, 2010.83.

⁵⁴ "WTOP | A New Wave Of Mexican Filmmakers Succeeds Internationally". *Wtop.Com*, 2018, <https://wtop.com/world/2018/03/a-new-wave-of-mexican-filmmakers-succeeds-internationally-2/>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

⁵⁵ Stephen M Hart. *A Companion to Latin American film*. Tamesis, 2010. 85.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

Hollywood (*Rudo y Cursi*, dir. Carlos Cuarón and *Beautiful*, dir. A. G. Iñárritu), while allowing them to keep their creative freedom. This was a good trade-off for shouldering the financial risks of a new production, since at this point, all three were recognized by the Academy Awards. It is this creative freedom, the implications of it, as well as the sacrifices, that I am investigating in this paper. Although the three directors are often discussed together, under the term “Three Amigos”. There is hardly any aesthetic commonality that links them, and their availability for highly commercial work varies greatly. This availability could serve as an indication for explicating their career patterns. Although their paths have been very different, it seems like the year 2006 was when then filmmaking came to international attention simultaneously through *Babel* (Iñárritu), *Children of Men* (Cuarón), and *Pan’s Labyrinth* (del Toro). In what follows, I will analyze what came before and after this moment for each director individually, and what conclusions can be drawn from each pattern. While most of their major films, in terms of budget and critical acclaim, are not about Mexico, they find ways of alluding to their background; whether that is through a love of mythical creatures, spirits and demons that originate from small Mexican *pueblos*, for del Toro, or a break in the Hollywood optimism that Iñárritu offers, with his raw, reflective images. Although Cuarón has exhibited the most commercial availability and genre fluidity, in movies like *Great Expectations* one could perhaps find a glimpse of Mexico’s class awareness.

Iñárritu is the one to receive the most critical attention out of the three; his debut movie, *Amores Perros*, was seen by many as the beginning of the Mexican New Wave- although it had already begun, in the early '90s, with Cuarón’s *Solo Con Tu Pareja*. Iñárritu was a radio man at the rock music station *WFM* in Mexico City during mid to late '80s, where he contributed with innovative ways of audio storytelling combined with promotional materials- a fundamental contribution to radio production in Mexico, as well as for his first movie that he marketed heavily in the early 2000s, like no other Mexican film was marketed ever before.

The summer that PRI lost the election to PAN after 71 years in office, Altavista released *Amores Perros*, its second ever feature.⁵⁷ Besides the critical acclaim which had been the subject of many articles and books, and the warm reception both domestically and internationally, the feature's advertising was intense and consistent- like no other Mexican feature. Iñárritu's background in advertising had provided him with the skills to promote his first feature. The funding for *Amores*, \$2.4 mil., came from Altavista, and a small portion from Iñárritu's own Zeta films. Although half of the budget was spent on advertising, an amount unheard of for Mexican productions, it grossed over \$10 mil. The success of *Amores* is seen as the official rebirth of Mexican Cinema and brings the Latin American directors into the critics' attention for the next decade.

The details surrounding the production and interviews with production members identify other neglected sources of the movie's success; as part of the research that went into writing a monograph of Iñárritu's first feature, Paul Julian Smith interviews the film's producer, Martha Sosa, to pinpoint the production strategies that brought the feature critical acclaim, in addition to the box office success. Sosa tells of two major instances that solidified the success of *Amores*: Cannes and the Academy Awards. Instead of submitting the film for the biggest awards, the team settled for the Critics' Week instead, a great opportunity for making an entry with lower stakes. Iñárritu saw this as an opportunity to talk about his film, as well as his views on filmmaking in Mexico; he saw the chance to feature D.F. as a metaphor in *Amores*, a "complex mosaic of an enormous city [...] made alive like an anthropological experiment."⁵⁸ German production designer Brigitte Broch, who has worked with Iñárritu on his trilogy and *Beautiful*, and with del Toro on *Cronos*, was able to help depict a Mexico from the eyes of an outsider, creating an image of an "exotic" D.F. that seemed foreign even to residents. Arriaga also spoke of his decision to

⁵⁷ Paul Julian Smith. *Amores Perros*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

⁵⁸ "Urban Cinefile: AMORES PERROS". *Urbancinefile.Com.Au*, 2001, <http://www.urbancinefile.com.au/home/view.asp?a=4736&s=features>. Accessed 16 June 2018.

write a tri-fold narrative: the first part, featuring Octavio, is inspired by his own childhood, while the second and the third are the present and future, showing the optimism he had for his career as the script ends on a fairly positive, Hollywoodian note of redemption through love.

For the Academy Awards, the production team played a slightly different card; they took advantage of the attention that the film had already received and hired an L.A. based publicist, which brought *Amores* a nomination, the first one a Mexican feature had received in over twenty years.⁵⁹ Back in Mexico, the critical reception did not echo that of Hollywood; IMCINE president took Iñárritu's success as an opportunity to decry an all-time low number of productions in the late '90s, early 2000s, while a critic from *El Financiero* reduced the feature to a well-advertised package that features clichés of Mexican identity.

It was not only the critics who expressed their mixed feelings about the latest Mexican success; the average moviegoer seemed displeased with portrayals of violence and corruption in a product that exported an image of Mexico to the world. Patricia Torres San Martín conducted research over the domestic reception of *Amores Perros* and found that while the working-class moviegoer in Guadalajara was unhappy to see on screens a reality they thought is an unfair international representation of Mexico, the public with a higher education recognized satirical elements and criticism of the political powers.⁶⁰ Because the country was heading towards a true democracy, movies like *Amores* that reminded citizens that corruption and violence have deep roots were seen as holding back the process of democratization.

Amores Perros was the first movie of a so-called “death trilogy” that started in Mexico and continued in the US with *21 Grams* and *Babel*. While the international cast and various locations that the last two movies feature mark the beginning of a shift towards Hollywood, the trilogy as a whole is still a consistent “art world.” After the trilogy and his split from Guillermo

⁵⁹ Paul Julian Smith. *Amores Perros*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2009.

⁶⁰ Patricia Torres San Martín. "Los Perros Amores de los Tapatíos." *Comunicación y Sociedad*, no. 37, 2000, . *Academic OneFile*, Accessed 16 June 2018. 176.

Arriaga, Iñárritu's movies shifted from multiple lead characters, to a single character, and seems to have abandoned the interwoven narrative. *Biutiful*, the first release after this separation, illustrates this clearly: if *Amores*, *21 Grams*, and *Babel* all featured multiple characters in interlaced, non-linear narratives, *Biutiful* focuses on the conflict and drama of a single character, Uxbal, a career criminal battling prostate cancer. This also marks a return to Mexican cinema, which will become characteristic of Iñárritu, who goes back to his cinematic roots every few movies- his interest for different modes of narration comes back with *Birdman*, but for different purposes, as I will later explain.

Just before the pattern of his career could become predictable, in 2014, Iñárritu returns to CRM, whom he collaborated with on *Babel*, to direct a television series called *The One Percent* that dealt with a farming family's difficulties in the Midwest. The production of *Birdman* kept pushing back the series, and eventually, *Starz* pulled out of the deal, leaving the series with no concrete broadcasting opportunity. The project would star Hilary Swank and Ed Helms and the team included the writers from *Birdman* and the cinematographer that Iñárritu worked with on *Birdman* and *Revenant*, Emmanuel Lubezki. The news of the deal with *Starz* falling through, in 2017, were the latest update on the project.⁶¹

In 2017, he releases *Carne y Arena*, a short drama based on true stories from refugees; however, the subject matter was not the focus of the attention and the special Oscar it received, first one since *Toy Story* in 1996.⁶² Iñárritu presented viewers at Cannes, where it was first shown, with a VR installation which provided them, for six and a half minutes, with "an auteur VR" experience centered around Mexican refugees traveling to the US. After the premiere, the short was shown in L.A., Milan, and Mexico City. Iñárritu does not return to Mexico solely from a

⁶¹ Zack Sharf. "Alejandro González Iñárritu And Emmanuel Lubezki'S 10-Episode Television Series Dropped By Starz". *Indiewire*, 2018, <http://www.indiewire.com/2017/03/alejandro-gonzalez-íñárritu-television-series-one-percent-1201789433/>. Accessed 30 May 2018.

⁶² Carita Rizzo. "Alejandro Iñárritu Ushers In The Future Of Film With 'Carne Y Arena'". *Variety*, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/film/awards/alejandro-íñárritu-carne-y-arena-governors-awards-2017-1202606852/>. Accessed 16 June 2018.

subject matter perspective, but he picks up on his collaboration with Emmanuel Lubezki, who had worked with both Cuarón and Iñárritu for *The Revenant*, *Children of Men*, *Birdman*, *Gravity*, *Y Tu Mama Tambien*, *A Little Princess*, and *Solo Con Tu Pareja*. However, *Carne y Arena* went by quietly, and despite its innovation in both medium and approach, it has not received much attention. Carita Rizzo wrote for *Variety*:

The installation takes the participant through an attempt to cross the US/Mexico border, a horrific experience for so many immigrants. The viewer gets to observe violent border captures and watch dehydrated people, clearly in pain, being taken by police to detention centers. The participant can wander around or stay in place, watch the immigrants or the police while standing in the middle of the scene or to the side. Sticking your head inside one of the bodies shows its pulsing heart, which is just one way of inviting the participant to explore the situation like a video game of sorts. The trick with VR, as well as a filmmaker's greatest challenge, has always been to direct the action when the participant is free to direct their gaze wherever, whenever. Iñárritu appears to solve this by not giving the participant a narrative so much as a six-minute immersion into hell on earth.⁶³

These last two projects suggest that lately, Iñárritu has been engaging with, or returning to his indie roots from *Amores Perros*- in terms of creating innovative projects and revisiting a subject matter and a crew that he has engaged with in the past.

Almost simultaneously with *Amores Perros*, Cuarón's *Y Tu Mama Tambien* was released and was an international success, but before this point, he had a career in television and directed *Solo Con Tu Pareja*, his first feature, with a significant success. Cuarón's filmography is, to this day, small and encyclopedic in its approach of different genres and styles, with projects separated by a good number of years between them: his debut, *Solo Con Tu Pareja*, followed by *The Little Princess* and Dickens' adaptation of *Great Expectations*. These choices, however surprising for a Mexican director, secured his place in Hollywood and Cuarón projects in the new millennium were two successful, yet stylistically different features: *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), a Mexican feature that explores sexuality and national identity (*Y Tu Mama Tambien*) and the dystopian sci-fi *Children of Men*.

⁶³ Carita Rizzo. "Alejandro Iñárritu Ushers In The Future Of Film With 'Carne Y Arena'". *Variety*, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/film/awards/alejandro-inaarritu-carne-y-arena-governors-awards-2017-1202606852/>. Accessed 16 June 2018.

Solo Con Tu Pareja was a romantic comedy which treated contemporary issues in the same light-hearted way as *Y Tu Mamá También*. Funded by the state, this time, the middle-class Mexican audience resonated with the middle-class protagonists: the HIV scare, failure of relationships and marriage, as well as the over saturation of marketing that the protagonist immerses himself in. Not long after, Cuarón moved to Hollywood following Sydney Pollack's invitation to direct a project which eventually fell through, and his first directing job in the US ended up being an episode of the series *Fallen Angels* (1993). Two years later, he signed a contract with Warner Brothers to direct *A Little Princess*, an adaptation of the eponymous novel written by Frances Burnett, marking an official career shift to Hollywood: the feature was produced with American crew and actors. Interestingly, his next feature was another adaptation (Charles Dickens *Great Expectations*, 1998), which he accepted to direct, for 20th Century Fox this time, upon (anecdotally) the studios' persistence. In 2001, *Y Tu Mama Tambien* takes the film world by storm, and marks a return to Mexico: cast and crew are hispanic.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF ART WORLDS

Y Tu Mama was followed by *Children of Men*, *Harry Potter: The Prisoner of Azkaban*, and finally, *Gravity* in 2013. Unlike Iñárritu, and although he has proven he's capable of switching between genres and environments, there is no one particular niche that encapsulates Cuarón's essence; even his earlier, pre-Hollywood movie, *Solo Con Tu Pareja*, is a take on Hollywood filmmaking and conventions which, Spanish language aside, could fit right into this aesthetic that ultimately he has been loyal to.

While all three filmmakers have pursued careers in Hollywood, some have exhibited more availability towards commercial work than others (Cuarón), some have been consistent with a specific genre in both Art Worlds (del Toro and his affinity for science fiction), while finally Iñárritu has experimented with both Indie and mainstream, television and cinema, and has achieved maintaining a style that becomes familiar to the viewer, yet always surprising. . It is not impossible to believe that the maker of *Amores Perros* is also the creator of *Carne y Arena*. In this context, Cuarón seems to be the most aesthetically fluid, approaching such a variety of genres and work environments that, out of the three directors, it makes the "Three Amigos" structure hard to evaluate from an aesthetic consistency perspective. In what follows, I seek any connections between these "art worlds" and the filmmakers' consistency in terms of crew (DoP in particular, but also screen writers and editors).

Similarly, del Toro's filmography, from *Pan's Labyrinth* to *The Shape Of Water* presents a perennial inclination towards Hispanic history and mythology. Nevertheless, his availability towards commercial work makes features like *Mimic* (1997), the comic book adaptations *Blade II* (2002) and *Hellboy* (2004), followed by *Hellboy II* (2008) and *Pacific Rim* (2013) stand out from the rest of his features, which are charged with symbolism and, according to del Toro, are political. Del Toro claims that this commercial availability does not take away the coherence of his body of work, and that a commercial feature like *Hellboy* is no less representative of his work than the critically acclaimed Spanish features which, he says, everyone seems to prefer (Davies et al. even split their analysis of del Toro's filmography between his English versus Spanish speaking features.)⁶⁴ He says in an interview:

When Alfonso [Cuarón] was going to do Harry Potter [and the Prisoner of Azkaban], I had done *Blade II*, and Alfonso said "I'm very nervous about taking [on this project] because it's not a personal movie for me and I didn't generate the book", and he said "how do I ensure that I'm really [speaking in my own voice]" , and I said "do you care [about the work]?" He said "I love it". I said, "Are you invested?", and he said "yes". So I told him, "well listen, it's like a crime scene, some of your DNA is going to make it. You're going to leave [behind] some DNA."⁶⁵

Through such interviews, del Toro and the other two directors contribute to creating their image as artistes --stating that one leaves his DNA in a film production is a metaphor as well as an industrial practice.

Movies like *The Devil's Backbone* and *The Shape of Water* illustrate his assertion that horror is a political genre;⁶⁶ just like *Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Devil's Backbone* is set in the late 1930s, during, or right after the Spanish Civil War. Much like *Amores Perros*, *The Devil's Backbone* serves as a metaphor for a fatherless country, symbolized here by the orphanage that

⁶⁴ Ann Davies et al. *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo Del Toro*. Palgrave Macmillan; 2014.

⁶⁵ Jason Gorber. "Gorber's Epic Guillermo del Toro Interview, Part 2: On Producing and Building a Canon of Work." *Screenanarchy.com*, 2013. <http://screenanarchy.com/2013/01/gorbers-epic-guillermo-del-toro-interview-part-2-on-producing-and-building-a-canon-of-work.html>. Accessed 25 June 2018.

⁶⁶ Gilbert Cruz. "10 Questions For Guillermo Del Toro". *TIME.Com*, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2090370,00.html>. Accessed 25 June 2018.

little Carlos, who lost his father in the war, is taken to. *The Devil's Backbone* is situated at the intersection of three different entities: Spanish, Mexican, and Hollywood, first as a co-production between the Spanish El Deseo, the Mexican Tequila Gang picked by Sony Pictures Classic for US distribution,⁶⁷ and second, as a product which, through its transnational nature, is comprehensible to audiences within and outside these spaces.

Pan's Labyrinth and *Babel* are, as Paul Julian Smith notes, two movies released around the same time, which deal with similar themes- nationality and identity.⁶⁸ However, Smith praises the former in detriment of the latter for its “technical perfection of its plotting, shooting, and cutting (not to mention its meticulous art design and expert animatronic and digital effects), [...] a new model for world cinema production.”⁶⁹ The natural movement from fantasy to reality is a characteristic that Smith and many others have noticed about del Toro's films: it is hard to label the monsters and mythical creatures as an other because they seem to fit naturally in a carefully crafted universe. This statement finds even more relevance in his latest movie *The Shape of Water*, which portrays a fantastic universe intermingled with the mundane in its most natural forms. The amphibian creature comes from South America and is the object of scientific interest in the US- as well as Eliza's love interest- and if we consider del Toro's statement about politics in the genre, the way the amphibian is treated could be interpreted in light of the recent US-Mexico relationships; Smith writes in another essay, citing scholar Laura Podalski: “The fusion of the human and the monstrous in del Toro, so alien to Anglo-American horror, results not in confusion but in semi-allegorical commentaries on US society.”⁷⁰ From a mythological perspective, the amphibian is a result of South American influences. The Aztec Chacmool was

⁶⁷ Antonio Lázaro-Reboll. “The Transnational Reception of *El espinazo del diablo* (Guillermo del Toro 2001).” *Hispanic Research Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1, February 2007.39.

⁶⁸ Paul Julian Smith. “Pan's Labyrinth (El laberinto del fauno).” *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Summer 2007),4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,4.

⁷⁰ Ann Davies et al. *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo Del Toro*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2014.x-xi.

the rain god, but representation of it were found all over Mesoamerica, making it difficult to pinpoint it to a more specific location.⁷¹ Many other variations are found throughout South America: *Yacuruna* in the Amazonian region,⁷² the *igpupiara* and *water caboclo* in Brazil are some of them.⁷³ Nevertheless, the creature's mythical roots seem lie in South America.

The production design and cinematography are two elements through which del Toro defines his “art world” very precisely and distinguishes himself from the other two directors; his films maintain not only a visual resemblance in terms of contrast and tones, but the setting is almost always a character in and of itself. The lab in *Shape* is a vivid representation of the Cold War era, through its cold, aqua tones, as well as the uniforms that Eliza and the rest of the staff wear. Similarly, the orphanage in *The Devil's Backbone* conveys a feeling of isolation- literal and metaphorical, as the orphanage is located in the middle of nowhere. Along with the ticking bomb in the yard that casts a perpetual threat and the feeling of an impending death, the ghost-child character Santi also announces, ominously, that “Many of you will die.”⁷⁴ The orphanage is built like a fortress, which reinforces the feeling of isolation and reminds, or tell for those unfamiliar, the true consequences of war.⁷⁵

Del Toro's “art world” relies heavily on carefully crafted sets that accomodate characters between real and imagined; to create the cinematic universe of *Shape*, he spent years (and hundreds of thousands of dollars) designing the amphibian creature and brainstorming ideas with cinematographer Dan Laustsen ever since *Pacific Rim* in 2013. This underlines the collaborative

⁷¹ Mary Miller and Karl Taube. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. London: Thames & Hudson. 1993.

⁷² Cristopher Aguilar. "The Mythology Behind The Shape Of Water". *Talk Film Society*, 2018, <http://www.talkfilmsociety.com/articles/the-mythology-behind-the-shape-of-water>. Accessed 25 June 2018.

⁷³ Andriolli Costa. "Brazilian Folklore — Notes On The Shape Of Water – Andriolli Costa – Medium". *Medium*, 2018, <https://medium.com/@andriolli/brazilian-folklore-notes-on-the-shape-of-water-c65a067b4b05>. Accessed 25 June 2018.

⁷⁴ Guillermo del Toro. *The Devil's Backbone*. 2001.DVD.

⁷⁵ Julian Savage. “The Object(s) of Interpretation: Guillermo Del Toro's El Espinazo Del Diablo (The Devil's Backbone).” *Senses of Cinema*, issue 21, July 2002.

aspect of film-world-making and as a result, in what follows, I analyze who contributes to the making of the Art World of each director by looking at their crew choices throughout their careers, and turn to interviews with crew members and directors.

The Three Amigos found additional ways of making their name known in Hollywood and gaining more influence as filmmakers: they set up various production companies. Besides the aforementioned Cha Cha Cha Films, which produced four films (the fifth is TBA), among which *Rudo y Cursi* and *Biutiful*, the three have also went on to open their individual production companies: del Toro set up Mirada Studios with his long-term cinematographer Guillermo Navarro in 2010, and Tequila Gang, a London-Mexico production and distribution company. Cuarón launched *Esperanto Filmoj*, named after the international language Esperanto, and based on a remark that del Toro made in a 2007 article about *Pan's Labyrinth*: "Cinema is the Esperanto of the modern world."⁷⁶ The production company released, among many others, *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Rudo y Cursi*, and *Gravity*. Gael Garcia Bernal and Diego Luna, the stars of *Amores Perros* and *Y Tu Mama* started their own production company in Mexico, Canana Films, in 2005, and since then it has released nineteen features and recently partnered with Golden Phoenix Productions to work on television docuseries about mystery murders in Ciudad Juarez.⁷⁷ Inarritu and Cuarón's movies were undoubtedly a stepping stone in the careers of these two actors: Diego Luna appears in the 2016 *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* as a lead actor, and Gael Garcia Bernal has become, after a solid career, the only Mexican actor on *The Time 100 List*.⁷⁸

All of these production companies that Mexican actors and directors have set up support a multicultural filmmaking in both English and Spanish language and extend the filmmakers'

⁷⁶ "Guillermo Del Toro Cree Que El Cine Es El Esperanto Del Mundo Actual". *La Vanguardia*, 2018, <http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20070130/51303795331/guillermo-del-toro-cree-que-el-cine-es-el-esperanto-del-mundo-actual.html>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

⁷⁷ H. Rosenberg. "Two Film Production Companies Plan To Fund And Produce Documentary Films In Mexico". *24-7 Press Release Newswire*, 2010, <http://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release/two-film-production-companies-plan-to-fund-and-produce-documentary-films-in-mexico-151910.php>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

⁷⁸ <https://nativocrafts.com/2016/04/time-100-alejandro-gonzalez-inarritu-gael-garcia-bernal/>

influence to a truly worldwide scale; Iñárritu, Cuarón, and del Toro do not see themselves solely as directors, but as *artistes* who carefully utilize their influence to support a more diverse Hollywood- something they have advocated for during their Academy Award acceptance speeches. Subordinating these moments of power and recognition to an agenda of equality and diversity is something that is becoming more and more prevalent and undermines the notion that Hollywood represents a strict geographical and cultural space. The three have also used their influence for the benefit of national Mexican cinema: in 2007, they lobbied President Felipe Calderon for more government support allocated to the film industry, and for the Mexican TV networks to become more involved in domestic film production, as broadcasters around the world often are.⁷⁹

Cuarón made *Gravity* with 80% computer graphics and with protagonist Sandra Bullock acting inside a mechanical rig;⁸⁰ Iñárritu attempts a single-take feature through creative editing and filming techniques. Del Toro's most recent feature, *The Shape Of Water*, is a signature Sci-Fi depicting an aquatic love story, filmed without a drop of water. Once again, there is something that brings the three together: this time, not their origins or a similar aesthetic, but an ambition to revolutionize and challenge filmmaking.

One of the so-called traits of the transnational aesthetic, as it has been labeled by academics, is the tripartite structure, as seen with Iñárritu's *Amores Perros*, *Babel*, and *21 Grams*, Wong Kar Wai's *Days of Being Wild*, *In The Mood For Love*, and *2046*. Transnational aside (as I have argued previously, that is not a productive term for discussing cinema effectively, at least anymore), trilogies, or series, have a higher potential for creating a more coherent cinematic universe which, as seen with Inarritu, can build an auteuristic persona that sells better. An aspect

⁷⁹ John Hecht. "'Three Amigos' Seek Support For Mexican Film Biz". *Reuters.Com*, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/film-mexico-dc/three-amigos-seek-support-for-mexican-film-biz-idUSN2123856120070321>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

⁸⁰ Dave Brody. "Making 'Gravity': How Filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón Created 'Weightlessness' Without Spaceflight". *Space.Com*, 2013, <https://www.space.com/23073-gravity-movie-weightlessness-alfonso-Cuarón.html>. Accessed 31 May 2018.

that speaks to that and which I intend to analyze here is whether the same craftsmen were part of the crews that created these trilogies, and if they collaborated on any productions that followed.

In the past five years, four of the Best Director Academy awards went to Mexican directors.⁸¹ If the “Three Amigos” construction and the headlines of “Mexicans take over Hollywood” headlines were not already widely circulated, the recent critical acclaim has secured this fame. Although the success revolves around the directors, as is wont to occur in a very *auteurist* industry, I later turn to an analysis of the crews that the filmmakers have worked with throughout their careers; given that all exhibit a certain degree of genre flexibility, my analysis of the creative voices they consistently employ in their productions aims to inquire whether the early cinematic success in Mexico meant a boost for the cinematographers’ and art directors’ careers, and if maintaining Mexican crew members throughout the transition was in fact a statement of sorts, be it political or artistic.

The most crucial crew members for this analysis are screenwriters and DoPs, mainly because of the nature of my inquiry. When pinpointing and defining a certain aesthetic of a filmmaker, one naturally refers to a visual consistency, whether that concerns shot length or editing, but also, especially in the case of Iñárritu, character development and narrative structure. Iñárritu’s initial collaboration with screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga resulted in *Amores Perros* in 2001 and continued with *21 Grams*, their first Hollywood movie, and *Babel*, the third movie of the trilogy, was a US-Mexico-France production, co-produced by Iñárritu’s production company Zeta Films, founded in 1991. Their collaboration fell through shortly after *Babel*, and Arriaga went on to direct his own projects: *The Burning Plain* (2008), *Rio, I Love You* (2014) and *Words with Gods* (2014), all three which he also wrote, but which did not receive significant critical attention.

⁸¹ Daniel Arkin. "Mexican Directors Have Won In Four Of The Last Five Years". *NBC News*, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/card/mexican-directors-have-won-four-last-five-years-n853481>. Accessed 17 June 2018.

Emmanuel Lubezki, on the other hand, collaborated with both Iñárritu and Cuarón both in their early days and in their most recent releases. Lubezki was a cinematographer on Iñárritu's *Birdman* and *Carne y Arena*, as well as Cuarón's *Solo Con Tu Pareja*, *A Little Princess*, *Y Tu Mama Tambien*, and *Children of Men*. It would make sense then to analyze the relationship Iñárritu and del Toro had with their DoPs, since they are the most consistent of the three. Just like Cuarón and Lubezki, Iñárritu had his long-run DoP, whom he collaborated with on his trilogy and *Biutiful*- Rodrigo Prieto, a Mexican cinematographer. Del Toro also has his long-term cinematographer, Guillermo Navarro, the DoP for *Cronos*, *The Devil's Backbone*, *Hellboy*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, and *Pacific Rim*. And as he is known for his taste for Sci-Fi, he called Trey Harrell who had worked on the VFX in *Crimson Peak*, to bring to life the underwater creature in *The Shape of Water*, played by Doug Jones. The image is one of the aspects that can establish "style" and a consistency in his industrial practices.

Interestingly, a "cinematic style" is often attributed to the director, a sign that Hollywood is still heavily influenced by an auteur theory. Cinematography is a big part of the overall 'visual style' of a director, and while some elements can be attributed to a directorial view (the choice of a long take versus a short one, a characteristic of Iñárritu's visual style), it is difficult to place vision above execution. Nevertheless, looking at del Toro's latest feature, the *Shape of Water*, for which Dan Laustsen, the cinematographer, it seems as the Danish DoP, who had worked in Hollywood extensively, was an unexpected choice for many, yet one that made sense. Laustsen had previously worked on *John Wick: Chapter 2*, *Crimson Peak*, *Silent Hill* and a number of national Danish productions, almost exclusively horror/sci-fi. Del Toro and Laustsen had worked together previously on *Mimic* and *Crimson Peak*. It was on the set of the latter that del Toro introduced his DoP to the idea of what became *The Shape of Water*. Laustsen notes in an interview that *The Shape of Water* is chromatically very similar to *Mimic* from 1997. In an interview for *Filmmaker Magazine*, Laustsen says:

When we were making *Crimson Peak*, Guillermo said he wanted to do this story about a girl who could not speak and a fishman and we should shoot it in black-and-white. I was excited by that. I think all cinematographers want to shoot a black-and-white movie. But I'm actually very happy that we didn't do the black-and-white because I think the color in this movie is so powerful.[...] That steel blue color we used for *The Shape of Water* goes all the way back to something we used on *Mimic*. When I have those steel blue and green colors, I'm always at 3200° Kelvin on the lights and 3200° Kelvin on the camera as well. Then I'll use gel on the lights to get the exact color I want. Guillermo and I like to shoot at a 1-to-1 ratio, meaning that our dailies look more or less like the final movie is going to look. In the Digital Intermediate (DI) we'll use some power windows for adjustments, but the overall color is very close to what we shot.⁸²

He goes on to emphasize that the artistic decisions were his as much as the director's, and that for financial reasons, all chromatic effects were, for the most part, achieved through the camera instead of post-production. This is a clear example of consistency maintained through utilizing members of the crew who have key positions in influencing a film's aesthetic and artistic values.

What a DoP, a director, and a writer ultimately create is a coherent cinematic universe. Although I am mainly looking at the DoPs and writers in this industrial analysis, to solidify my analysis, I include one art director who was part of the recurrent teams in a few of these movies. In fact, it would make sense that, if one was seeking a consistency, they would look to keep their art director Eugenio Caballero, a Mexican art director who has worked on *Pan's Labyrinth*, for which he received an Academy Award, and *Rudo y Cursi*. The art director is one of the very first crew members to be hired on a production, and the one who has a great influence on the visual style of the film. Caballero says that his role in the production has to do with enhancing the message that the director wants to convey, by providing a "believable" setting that does not break the mood.⁸³ Of *Pan's Labyrinth* in particular, for which he received an Oscar in 2007, he says, in an interview, that he started sketching and researching before the script was even drafted, and that

⁸² Matt Mulcahey et al. "DP Dan Laustsen On The Shape Of Water, Judging Exposure Without A Meter And Capturing Rich Blacks | Filmmaker Magazine". *Filmmaker Magazine*, 2018, <https://filmmakermagazine.com/104228-dp-dan-laustsen-on-the-shape-of-water-judging-exposure-without-a-meter-and-capturing-rich-blacks/#.WwF6JWgvy3A>. Accessed 12 June 2018.

⁸³ "Eugenio Caballero Masterclass". *Www2.Filmfestival.Gr*, 2017, <http://www2.filmfestival.gr/en/professionals-b2b-tdf/press/news-press-en/1689-newsid-en-1198>. Accessed 12 June 2018.

ideas were bounced back and forth between him and del Toro. Interviews like these emphasize the collaborative aspect of filmmaking in contrast with a (still) auteur-centered Hollywood.

Iñárritu has the advantage of having released a trilogy; whether by choice or obligation, he has maintained a consistent crew from his first release in Mexico, *Amores Perros*, and throughout his transition to Hollywood which this trilogy supported. Brigitte Broch was a production designer on Iñárritu's trilogy and *Biutiful*, as well as Cuarón's *Solo Con Tu Pareja*, and an art director on del Toro's *Cronos*. Del Toro himself had worked as a makeup artist for ten years before directing, but the cinematographer, Guillermo Navarro and producer Bertha Navarro, are the only recurrent crew members throughout the credits.

Birdman marks an even bigger and bolder leap in his career- the first comedy he ever attempted, and the first fully-digital film to win an Academy Award.⁸⁴ Photography wise, both *Birdman*, which intends to give the impression of a one-take movie (a technical and aesthetic ambition unusual for the 21st century) and *The Revenant*, with its desolate landscapes and scarce dialogue, mark a departure from Iñárritu's visual style. Could this change in visual style and technique be, perhaps, what scholars and spectators refer to as "a change in aesthetic" when they note one? *The Revenant*'s extravagantly simple image was filmed in over twelve locations, from various locations in Canada, Argentina, Montana and Arizona, and several locations in Mexico, all to keep a visual consistency as seasons changed throughout the seven month long production. The plot focuses on Hugh Glass, the central character, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who is mauled by a bear and left to die by his fellow members of the hunting team at the beginning of the movie; Glass spends the remainder of the film looking for John Fitzgerald, his confidant who had betrayed him, to confront him and seek revenge.

Once again, Iñárritu approaches themes that are familiar to the subject matter of his movies: paternal relations and the need for revenge as a guiding motive for the narrative, as well

⁸⁴ Brian Papish. "Alejandro González Iñárritu's Cinematic Style | Highsnobiety". *Highsnobiety*, 2016, <https://www.highsnobiety.com/2016/03/01/alejandro-gonzalez-inairritu-biography/>. Accessed 12 June 2018.

as a focus on a central character's turmoil that started with *Beautiful*. However, as Chris Miller points out, (one of the very few academic articles dedicated to Iñárritu's most recent features) in an article comparing *The Revenant* and *Birdman*, both movies set off with a fiery meteor. Miller points out that the similarity of the images, along with the repetition of an undeniably peculiar event, seems to be intentional on the filmmaker's behalf:

In *Birdman*, the meteor makes its first appearance at the outset of the film before the onscreen introduction of characters or utterance of dialogue. In *The Revenant*, the meteor crashes earthward at the midpoint. The images are striking in their similarity, suggesting an intent on the part of the filmmaker to thematically unite the two films.⁸⁵

The protagonist in *Birdman* faces interior and exterior conflicts, a set up all too familiar for Iñárritu's main characters; Riggan Thompson, an outdated actor played by Michael Keaton, is trying to revive his career by starring in his own Broadway play. The metacinematic aspect is rather new to Iñárritu, and along with this reflection on artistic success versus obsolescence, it could be that he reached, with *Birdman*, the point in his career where he can afford a retrospective look. *The Revenant* and *Birdman* are bold statements for his filmmaking as a whole, a portrait of the *artiste*.

The idea that his last two features come as a response to the discussions surrounding his ability to switch between aesthetics is supported by the very (existentialist) question that both seem to be asking: what is art and what is commerciality, in the *The Revenant*, and what is it that makes artwork last, differentiating it from vernacular and ephemeral? Attention is drawn to the cinematography too, to support these questions: in Iñárritu's words, "it was meant to be an extension of the emotional state of the character, to sustain the emotion, the flow, the internal rhythm, the point of view."⁸⁶ The swirling narrative is mirrored by the cinematography, a complex project in itself, put together by Iñárritu and Lubezki, who together attempted to create a

⁸⁵ Chris Miller, Film Review, *Psychological Perspectives*, 2017. 60:3, 406-409, DOI: 10.1080/00332925.2017.1350814

⁸⁶ Melena Ryzik. "Mike Nichols Told Him Not To Do It". *Nytimes.Com*, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/movies/awardsseason/alejandro-g-íñárritu-turns-birdman-into-risk-central.html>. Accessed 12 June 2018.

feature-length single shot. Their ambition was positively met by audience and critics, who praised *Birdman* in their reviews and yearly lists of best films. Michael Keaton's ability to provide a multi-faceted, rich performance was also the subject of praise. In interviews he has given about his last two features, Iñárritu confesses that there is a certain autobiographical element to Michael Keaton's character Riggan and that he identifies "with each of those characters, because I have been like them or I have observed them or I have worked with them. The whole mirror of characters has been part of my life in the first 50 years." One of the questions addressed in the same interview concerns what the author calls "a stylistic departure from [Iñárritu's] other work", and his response comes as somewhat as a surprise; although it may seem that he is graciously avoiding giving a precise answer, he states that he doesn't adapt a new style, he looks at filmmaking differently, an inherent aspect to his duality as a filmmaker:

I think I change the way I deal with it [the subject]. I learned that I can be very dark but have a very sharp sense of humor, too. I think [being] intelligent creatures is to have two ideas at the same time — you can have happiness and depression simultaneously. I think that's what really this guy is battling; it's the duality we all have. Sometimes you can feel the king of world and 30 minutes later, you are a dead piece of [expletive]. I have been having that question: "Hey, you look like a very happy guy. Why you make all this dark things?" I am night and day, every day. I accept that.⁸⁷

We can, of course, limit the discussion of Iñárritu's filmmaking to "changes in approach", but it not a productive framework as it does not present itself with any possibilities of furthering the discussion as to what aspects of filmmaking scholars and spectators consider when they assess that a filmmaker's style has changed, or that they feature transnational aesthetics. Outside of the academic space, which as I have explained, has given very little attention to these movies, the average movie goer had very mixed, yet bold feelings about Iñárritu moving away from a typical Hollywood narrative and inserting clear *auteur* moves; the comments to the interview I cited above from *New York Times* are split between recognizing Iñárritu as an *auteur*, capable of showing flexibility in his filmmaking, while others appreciate it to be "like the blatherings of a

⁸⁷ Ibid.

man who never really grew up past adolescence. All of this grandiose posturing in the form of a meta-textual Raymond Carver adaptation just reeked of self-obsession. It's the cinematic equivalent of a *look mom, no hands* moment."⁸⁸

However, the scholarly reviews of Iñárritu's latest features have been "off the beaten path", in the sense that his movies seem to no longer be analyzed solely from a cinematic perspective. Instead, they are seen as works of an established filmmaker, free from the burden of having to prove themselves, and constitute a source for multidisciplinary exploration. *The Revenant* and *Birdman* no longer carry the burden of endorsing Iñárritu's filmmaking abilities; he has convinced Hollywood audiences of that. *Birdman*, as Miller points out, is a satire, and perhaps a thinly-veiled autobiography. But again, what does metareferentiality do for the audience? Madeyra writes:

[...] the audience is forced by the obvious convergences between probable fantasy and actual reality to consider the struggle of an actor who desires not to be debased into the proprietorship of film corporations, but to be respected as an artiste. Through the device of parody for culture jamming, the paying audience is now exposed to the dehumanizing industrial transformations and commercial concessions that even talented actors must go through before they find their way into big budget movies.⁸⁹

There is obviously a discrepancy between what scholars appreciate that metacinema does for the audience (or what it should do) and what the average moviegoer thinks it does. The technical ambitions and metareferentiality of both *Birdman* and *Gravity* serve to indicate that Iñárritu and Cuarón have reached a point in their well-established careers where they can self-reflect and raise the standards of filmmaking, by overcoming the technically impossible. These universes that the filmmakers created with every film are visually represented through the image and expressivity of carefully chosen actors. Having so far focused on those behind the camera is not to assert that the actors are not agents of a cinematic universe. It is relevant, without a doubt, that the actors in

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Kumuthan Madeyra. "Birdman V Uttama Villain: Portrait Of The Artiste As An Older, Wiser Man". *Popmatters.Com*, 2015, <https://www.popmatters.com/193722-birdman-v-uttaman-portrait-of-the-artiste-as-an-older-wiser-man-2495527768.html> Accessed 12 June 2018.

Amores Perros have Mexican accents, that Luna and Garcia Bernal speak *Chilango*, and that Luna is a lead actor with a hispanic accent in *Rogue One*. The Three Amigos” relationships with their actors opens up further discussion of the industrial practices that individualize them. The tough working conditions on the set of *The Revenant* surfaced through interviews with DiCaprio, in which he describes being pushed beyond the limits of his body and immersing himself culturally and spiritually in the world of his character. After the film’s release, details of the production surfaced and soon the making of *The Revenant* was labeled as “a living hell.”⁹⁰ The scene in which DiCaprio’s character is eating a bison liver is real, Inarritu confirms, and involved the actor’s lawyers and agent. However, Inarritu says in the same interview that these were not limits imposed upon DiCaprio, but rather the actor’s own initiative to pursue method acting. Inarritu’s relationship with his actors is undoubtedly very close --from casting the right actor for the role to extensive pre-production dialogues in which he does not impose, but rather constructs the character with the actor. In *Birdman*, because it is meant to look as a continuous take, the pressure on crew and actors to deliver a high quality performance was greater than ever; some scenes were up to twenty minutes long, and flubbing a line would mean starting all over again --”If someone had given the performance of his or her life, it was just gone forever,”⁹¹ said Emma Stone, who plays Riggan Thompson’s daughter. For Inarritu, the actor must embody whatever ambition a movie might have, and Keaton did it so much so that the Mexican director said “It should be a Michael Keaton movie.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Kim Masters. "How Leonardo Dicaprio's 'The Revenant' Shoot Became 'A Living Hell'". *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-leonardo-dicaprios-revenant-shoot-810290>. Accessed 11 July 2018.

⁹¹ Pamela McClintock. "Making Of 'Birdman': Alejandro G. Inarritu Recounts Harrowing Experience Behind His First Comedy". *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/making-birdman-alejandro-g-inarritu-761407>. Accessed 11 July 2018.

⁹² “'Birdman' Star Michael Keaton Admits 'It'S Unlikely I'Ll Have This Experience Again'". *Variety*, 2014, <https://variety.com/2014/film/awards/birdman-star-michael-keaton-admits-its-unlikely-ill-have-this-experience-again-1201383871/>. Accessed 11 July 2018.

Cuaron's *Gravity* is another example of pressure weighing heavily on the actor's shoulders --a pressure that again is derived from technical ambitions of the film. Although throughout my analysis, Cuaron has proven to be the one to escape any conclusions I might draw with regards to his consistency, because of the nature of this film, the relationship he built with lead actress Sandra Bullock had to be solid enough to, first of all, convince Bullock to return to acting and second, to return for a role that was physically and mentally demanding --Bullock already had an Oscar for Best Actress for *The Blind Side* in 2009, and to bring back an established actor who retired voluntarily is a mission in itself. Despite his commercial availability and shifting between genres, Cuaron approaches working with actors with extreme care, whether it is coaching young actors Diego Luna and Gael Garcia Bernal, or working with experienced actors whom he trusts enough to give them freedom of co-writing the script (Clive Owen in *Children of Men*.)

Del Toro's careful orchestration of visual elements is such a priority in his filmmaking style that actors must dutifully serve the film's mission and blend in with the film-world --and that can perhaps mean less creative freedom than Inarritu and Cuaron's actors have. On his most recent feature, *The Shape of Water*, Sally Hawkins plays a mute character, and therefore has to rely heavily on gestures and facial expressivity. Del Toro says his choice to have a non-speaking lead actress was due to his belief that "Words lie. Looks don't. [...] An actor listens."⁹³ Another actor from the same production, Richard Jenkins, jokingly said that del Toro pitched him the script via email and that they have not talked since.⁹⁴

For the most part, the Amigos each have had long-lasting friendships and working relationships with their cinematographers, producers, and art directors --individuals who on a film

⁹³Chris Lee. "How Guillermo Del Toro Got Drunk At A Golden Globes After-Party And Made Sally Hawkins The Star Of The Shape Of Water". *Vulture.Com*, 2017, <http://www.vulture.com/2017/11/how-guillermo-del-toro-cast-sally-hawkins-in-shape-of-water.html>. Accessed 11 July 2018.

⁹⁴"Sally Hawkins On Starring In Guillermo Del Toro's 'The Shape Of Water': 'I Can Retire Now'". *Variety*, 2018, <https://variety.com/video/sally-hawkins-the-shape-of-water-guillermo-del-toro/>. Accessed 11 July 2018.

production hold a significant creative responsibility. These collaborations have opened doors both ways: Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* was recognized for its iconic photography, and Rodrigo Prieto went on to receive DoP credits on *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Babel*, *Argo* (2012), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), and *Silence* (2016).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the invisible part of the production, the crew, has been heavily neglected, as it is to be expected in an auteurist industry; their self-presentation as the Three Amigos and some of the industrial strategies that they employ to construct their images have supported this lack of scholarship. The cast is not a negligible aspect; in fact, Gael Garcia Bernal, the protagonist of *Amores Perros*, *Y Tu Mama, Babel*, and *Rudo y Cursi* had a fruitful working relationship with the Three Amigos, and although he was an established actor in Mexico before *Amores*, the majority of his acting career following that was focused on Indie productions. Javier Bardem, on the other hand, of Spanish origins, was a well-established actor before he met Iñárritu on the set of *Biutiful*, and has spent the majority of his career acting in big-budget movies: *No Country For Old Men*, *Skyfall*, and *Mother!*. Bardem's and Iñárritu's paths did not intersect except for *Biutiful*, yet the Mexican director's choice of casting a Spanish actor for the first Spanish-speaking feature since his debut with *Amores Perros* is not all that surprising; Bardem is a powerful actor and a Spanish native, the action being set in Barcelona.

This point in time when *Biutiful* was released, a decade after *Amores Perros*, marks a first circle in Iñárritu's career --not only because of his return to Hispanic settings and language, but it is something that has been reflected in the amount of scholarship --precisely the works that note his "transnational aesthetics." Around the years 2010-2012 is when the scholarly world has seen

an explosion of praise, , analyses, and interpretations of what the academic world thought the cinematic universe of Iñárritu in particular represents. A lot of these interpretations account for a historical explanation of the Amigos' emergence, from a New Wave to a full-blown Hollywood career. I have argued for an alternative to looking at these filmmakers as *transnational* by looking at them as part of Hollywood from the beginning of their careers: as post-NAFTA filmmakers, they did not experience the protectionist film industry that characterized the pre-NAFTA film scene, but a privatized, globalized industry.

In my introduction, I acknowledge Ezra and Rowden's definition of the transnational, as well as the alternatives "postnational" and "postclassical." I centered my analysis around inquiring into who contributed to the making of each Art World --all three directors have close working relationships with DoPs, production designers, or producers, whom they collaborated with on several of their films-- and the industrial practices that individualize them. The consistency of their Art Worlds is heavily influenced by their choice to work with certain crew members throughout their careers, exchanging ideas and outlining the collaborative aspect of filmmaking.

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VITA

Ana-Maria Lungu

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: *EL HOLLYWOOD: ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑARRITU*,

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in your major at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Film at Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, United Kingdom in 2016.